

**Greg Moore: Testimony to the Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources  
Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Reform  
Monday, November 28, 2005, 3:00pm**

Mr. Chairman and honorable committee members, thank you for the invitation to testify today about the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy and our role at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

My name is Greg Moore. I am the Executive Director of the Parks Conservancy and I have been with the organization for over two decades. My love of national parks began in 1974 when I was hired as a National Park Service ranger. Since then I have devoted my entire professional career to our national parks, both with the National Park Service and now as the executive director of a nonprofit support group, the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy.

The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy is a nonprofit membership organization that works to preserve the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, to enhance the experiences of park visitors, and to engage community members in conserving the parks for the future. Since our inception in 1981, the Parks Conservancy has provided nearly \$80 million of support to national park projects and programs.

The Parks Conservancy is one of over 100 similar nonprofit organizations nationally, known as friends groups or cooperating associations, working to support the mission of the National Park Service. These organizations, including the National Park Foundation, promote philanthropy and volunteerism for our parks. In our case, we also actively manage supporting education, visitor services, interpretive, conservation and park improvement programs.

Here at Golden Gate, we have parklands that have been recognized as nationally and internationally significant for their scenery, historic landmarks, and natural history. Each year, millions of visitors from across the country and around the world visit these parks, including Alcatraz, Muir Woods, the Marin Headlands or the Presidio. The total visitation of these parks now totals over 15 million people per year.

Parks are deeply restorative places and national parks are among the most cherished, inspiring awe and humility. Urban parks are doubly important as places that provide solitude and an escape from dense and frenetic urban life as well as a civic meeting ground for recreation, restoration, and ongoing stewardship. The Golden Gate National Recreation Area is a magical constellation of places – thought provoking and peaceful, expansive and dramatic – all eminently accessible to a densely populated metropolitan area. The Parks Conservancy works alongside the National Park Service to ensure that these places remain a philanthropic priority, open and accessible, with ample opportunities to enjoy them, to learn from them, and to contribute to their restoration and improvement.

Additionally, the San Francisco Bay Area community continues to show tremendous generosity and volunteerism to our national parks at the Golden Gate. At the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, our role is to open direct and active channels through which Americans can contribute their time and charitable gifts to augment the critical work of the National Park Service and Presidio Trust.

In my three decades of work with our national parks, I have observed a variety of key factors relevant to your Committee's review of the National Park System and the Centennial Act legislation.

**First, Americans love their national parks, believe in their intrinsic value and are willing to be generous to help preserve and enhance them.**

The American ethic of charity and volunteerism has made a remarkable impact on our national parks. In addition to more than \$100 million in annual philanthropic support, last year 140,000 volunteers donated 5 million hours to the national parks at a value of \$85.9 million<sup>1</sup>. What motivates this level of commitment?

Few things inspire Americans like the immense natural and physical beauty and the historical poignancy of national parks. We understand that national parks require not only the care and investment of the National Park Service, but our direct support and involvement as well. Americans entrust the National Park Service to lead the protection and stewardship of these cherished places and, in effect, to be the ultimate caretaker of our nation's heritage. Throughout the National Park system, whether at Golden Gate, Yosemite, the USS Arizona Memorial, Yellowstone, or Rocky Mountain National Park, philanthropic projects have been inspired by visionary Park Service leadership, implemented by effective and eloquent nonprofit partners, and funded by generous donors.

Here in the San Francisco Bay Area, community members share a very strong connection to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and recently contributed \$34 million for the restoration of Crissy Field, a former army airfield in the Presidio on the shore of San Francisco Bay. A lead gift of \$18 million by the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, followed by a major public campaign of the Parks Conservancy, rallied the community behind this project. Over 2,000 gifts and 3,200 volunteers transformed this national park site. Today, these donors and volunteers retain their commitment and generosity to our parks.

**Second, this generosity of time and money can only occur when a substantial National Park Service foundation is in place to receive and nurture public support and care for those investments.**

Organizations like the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy work very closely with the National Park Service and Presidio Trust to understand their priorities and to chart our strategic course in unison. The Conservancy helps our federal partners recognize which of its priorities are likely to have donor appeal, and we work together to ensure that donor-supported projects and programs are operationally and financially sustainable.

These philanthropic results depend upon Park Service and Presidio Trust commitment, professionalism, knowledge, and active staff presence in our parks. These capacities are essential to philanthropy working in a dynamic and effective way.

To make projects like Crissy Field meaningful to the community that supports them requires not only executing park transformations, but also an ongoing commitment to preserve over time what has been transformed and restored together. Federal operating funds can be leveraged with volunteer support in this long-term stewardship. As one example, each year over 15,000 people donate over 350,000 hours of volunteer time to preserve park habitat, lead interpretive tours and support education programs for children throughout the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

To sum up on this point, if donors give, they want to be assured that the NPS can care for the improvements their contributions made possible.

**Third, Americans do not want their generosity to actually erode or replace the federal funding commitments.**

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<sup>1</sup> National Park Service, Volunteers-In-Parks

Americans do not see their philanthropic support as a substitute for the role of the National Park Service or as a replacement for the funding provided through their tax dollars. Donors and volunteers are keenly aware of the Park Service role and follow its lead in addressing park needs and enhancements. Philanthropic donors do not have the interest, expertise, or capacity to substitute for vital federal responsibilities. Increasingly donors are also making their contributions contingent on the assurance that park budgets will be there to preserve and care for the park improvements that their gifts make possible. In fact, removing or diminishing federal funds when donor dollars are available would be a major disincentive to giving and a serious, perhaps lethal blow to the future of national park philanthropy. So, solid operating budgets are key ingredient to our success in bringing outside support to these parks.

Speaking at a recent conference on partnerships for public lands, David Rockefeller Jr., philanthropist and former vice chair of the National Park Foundation, stressed the important distinction between federal and philanthropic roles in our national parks. Our mission, he said, is “not to build roads or employee housing units, nor to build or maintain infrastructure, but to create strong connections between visitor and place.” He called this distinction the “Bright Line” between federal responsibility and private opportunity.

The healthiest public-private partnerships are preserved through an appropriate balance of investment. Many park budgets are stretched – with infrastructure repairs occurring over many years and even basic services strained. But these are not functions to be supported through philanthropy. In the words of my colleague, Ken Olson, who leads Friends of Acadia, “friends groups are here to provide the margin of excellence, not the margin of survival” for our parks.

The Centennial Act would provide vital relief to this straining balance and we commend the Chairman for his introduction of this bill. By ensuring revenue streams that help fund maintenance and operating needs of national parks, the Centennial Act can build a profound public confidence that the National Park Service – as the stewards of our nation’s heritage – will continue to lead the way in preserving these places for future generations.

To conclude, philanthropy and volunteerism are, and will continue to be, essential and positive forces in achieving the mission of the National Park Service. These forces will grow in scale and impact if Americans are asked to share in the vision for our national parks, if they are given respect for their views and involvement, if they are provided with clear and expeditious ways to contribute, if they know that their contributions will be effectively stewarded by the National Park Service, and if they are treated with sincere appreciation as they donate time and resources.

Our continued momentum will be greatest when leveraged from a firm foundation of federal funding, national park professionalism, and effective nonprofit partners, well aligned to the Park Service mission. Upon that foundation, we can and will achieve the margin of excellence so essential for our national parks, which collectively represent that very best of America’s scenic, natural and historical treasures.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify today. I’d be glad to answer any questions that you have.